

Fun awaits friends of **nature**

Hop down to Kubah National Park for annual Bornean Frog Race

KUCHING: The Bornean Frog Race will be held at Kubah National Park on April 27 in celebration of the fifth annual "Save the Frogs Day".

This is the second year the event is being held and it is jointly organised by the Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation (IBEC), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) and Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC).

If you are picturing little frogs set loose on the ground to race against each other while their owners cheer and scream at the top of their voices, you are probably not the only one.

A "frog race" isn't actually a regular run to the finish line; rather it is a full-day nature-oriented event that includes talks, exhibitions and other activities centred on the topic of amphibians and their conservation.

To give the public a better idea of what the race entails, *The Star* recently got in touch with Dr Indraneil Das from IBEC, Unimas.

Better known as Dr Neil, he is a herpetologist and is also one of the key people responsible for putting together the event.

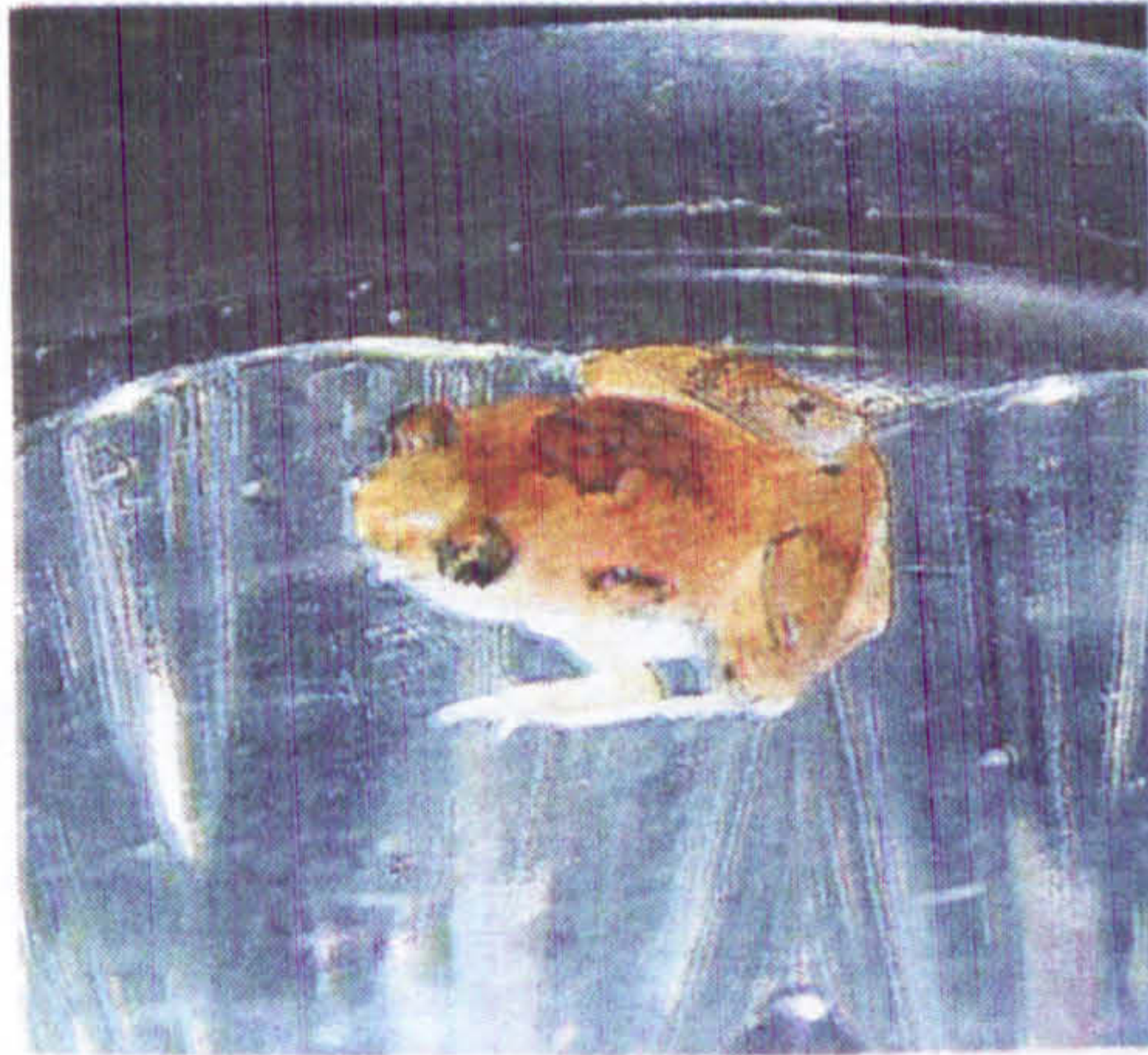
According to him, about a third of the world's known amphibians is under threat.

Since there are more than six thousand known species, the possibility of losing a third of the world's frogs, salamanders and other amphibians certainly sounds alarming.

Therefore, the race is one way of raising public awareness of this serious issue.

Apart from this, the race is also a great way of promoting Sarawak as an ecotourism destination as well.

"The original idea of the frog race was thought up by the graduate students of IBEC, Pui Yong Min and Ong Jia Jet. Both of them continue to be active in every aspect of the event, from drawing up the programmes to designing the attractive certificates," said Dr Neil.



Small wonder: One of the world's smallest frogs, the *Microhyla nepenthicola*. This particular one jumped and landed on the front end of a LED torchlight.

This year, the two have a much welcomed helping hand as they are joined by volunteers from Unimas and SFC.

The race is open to the public and visitors can look forward to a variety of programmes.

"There will be talks by amphibian specialists, a special screening of a BBC amphibian film, workshops on frog photography by two of the top nature photographers in the region, Hans Hazebroek and Ch'ien Lee.

"There will also be exhibitions on frogs in art, books and postage stamps as well as displays featuring frog images. The public can also listen to the calls of frogs," added Dr Neil.

The much-awaited highlight of the day would be the frog race which is scheduled at nightfall.

"During the race, participants will get the chance to race up Mount Serapi and document as many species as possible by taking photographs of what they find as evidence.

However, they must only follow designated paths and not veer off-trail so as to minimise disturbance to the vegetation and surroundings," Dr Neil added.

There are three categories in which participants will be competing for prizes namely rarest species, most number of species and the most aesthetic image.

"One of our main sponsors is Natural History Publications (Borneo) Sdn Bhd. Its proprietor, Datuk Chan Chew Lun, is once again, our generous benefactor, donating most of the prizes. These include very attractive frog statues in addition to natural history books published by his company," said Dr Neil.

The participant who takes the winning photo of the rarest species, will also be returning home with an original oil painting by British wildlife artist, Paul McNamee.

Dr Neil said that children are most welcome as long as they are accompanied by their guardians.

"Currently, our youngest registered participant is about eight years old. Most of the activities are also children-friendly. A specific Junior Education Programme is being planned by Unimas to be held at the Matang Wildlife Centre on the same day," assured Dr Neil.

He reminded participants to bring along their own cameras, flashlights and USB cables for uploading and transferring photos from camera to a computer.

Race participants should also be prepared to stay until late in the night, he added.

Registration for the race can be made online at <http://theborneanfrograce2013.weebly.com>.

Registration fees are RM25 per student, RM30 per non-student and RM50 per foreign participant.

The public are welcomed to join in the other non-race activities which are free of charge.